



# High Country

## An Illness of Metaphors

I would love to be able to scientifically explain why mental illness is painful, and isolating, and destructive. But mental illnesses are illnesses of metaphors. It's hard to describe depression as anything but a dark and endless pit that leaves me hopeless, as something that makes me feel like I can never get enough air.

It's hard to describe the way that depression intertwines with my moods, thoughts, and behaviors to a degree that symptoms seem like personality. Depression and every other mental illness manifest to a large degree as the way we interact with the world and its people, and that can make life hard for everybody.

All mental illnesses occur on a spectrum. Someone with a severe illness will have a very different experience from someone with a mild illness. Some will learn the right coping skills, or take the right medicine, and that will work for them. Others will have their lives turned upside down by relentless symptoms that never fully respond to any treatment.

The most persistent key to my ongoing recovery is maintaining hope. Depression occurs when hope is lost, and hope is lost when depression occurs. It's a cycle that brings me to my knees. It's dominos falling, and with each one that falls, it is harder and harder to stop them. It's a downward spiral, and when I reach the bottom, I am horribly weak. At those times, I wonder if there will ever be recovery for me.

But, when I am at the very bottom of it all, that is when I relent and relax. It seems like I can't bear it,

but actually, it's that I can't keep struggling against it. I become too tired to continue fighting, and I accept it. Accepting it may sound like giving up, but it's just the opposite. It humbles me and allows me to see that there is so much more in my life than just this fight.

It is at those times, when I can't connect with a single soul on this earth, I have the most intimate understanding of the strength I carry. That's when I see my depression is not who I am. I can feel that my brain is not working properly. There is a glitch, a short, and it needs fixing. I feel a very strange kind of relief when it gets so bad I know unquestioningly there is something physiologically wrong. I begin to have compassion for myself.

I don't like the depressed me, I don't like the struggle, but I struggle because I am in this world, and I love so deeply, and I feel so much, all the time. My emotions blind me sometimes. I don't want to be "mentally ill." I want to be someone who struggles with mental health issues who is still a loved and loving person.

I choose to go forward and believe no matter how intense my struggle, it does not define me. The roots of my life are good, and they are solid. No matter how many times I'm destroyed by storms I will continue to come back again and again. The blooms will always be a little different, and they will always be lovely. I am not a static person. I come and go in the same way roses die every fall and come back every spring. My comings and goings are less predictable in timing perhaps, but quite similar in cycle.

One day, my time on this earth will be over. Until then, I will keep blooming. I will keep praying those

I love will know that even when the beautiful part of me is gone, I am still there, and I will return.

I have thought more than once, “I’m glad I’m not famous.” I would hate for every nuance and dip of my life to be chronicled for all to see. I don’t need a projection of my mistakes and sorrows and flaws. I am well aware of them. I just need to be loved, and I need to be forgiven, and I need to be accepted. I want to tell you, I have tried my very hardest on this journey of my life. With every storm I understand more and more I am not the rose, I am the roots.

-Caroline Bond, NAMI High Country President



Caroline works for Baird’s Creek Presbyterian Church as well as the Hospitality House. She is pursuing her Master’s in Social Work at Appalachian State University. She has served at Board President for NAMI High Country for almost a year.

Welcome to NAMI High Country. NAMI, which stands for National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a National Organization. We are a local chapter that serves Watauga, NC and surrounding counties. If you are a person living with a mental illness, a friend or family member of someone living with a mental illness, a student interested in mental health issues, or a professional working in the mental health field – we hope you’ll be involved!

If you would like to receive this newsletter by mail or be added to our email list please call or email us. Our contact info is below. Professionals, feel free to make copies of our newsletter and give to clients or place in your office.

If Watauga County Schools are out the day of a monthly meeting we will not meet.

## Upcoming Meetings

**Monday, February 3, 2014**

**Caroline Stahlschmidt**

### **Food and Mood: How What You Eat Affects Your Brain and Mental Health**

Caroline is a Certified Holistic Health Coach from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. She helps clients reach optimal health by upgrading their nutrition, making lifestyle changes, and reducing stress. She uses a functional nutrition approach to uncover the root cause of health challenges. Caroline’s specialties include digestive issues, autoimmune conditions, cancer and working with athletes. *\*This meeting will run from 7pm-8pm*

Listen to Caroline Stahlschmidt speak on Roten in the Morning on AM 1450 WATA and NewsTalk 1200 WXIT on Friday, January 31 at 7:40am. She will be giving a preview of our February monthly meeting – Food and Mood!

**Monday, March 3, 2014**

### **Screening of “Call Me Crazy.”**

In April, Lifetime Television premiered *Call Me Crazy*, a series of interconnected short films that deal with the subject of mental illness. Through five short stories named after each title character—Lucy, Eddie, Allison, Grace and Maggie—powerful relationships built on hope and triumph give viewers a new understanding of what happens when a loved one struggles with mental illness. This TV movie was co-produced with NAMI. *\*This meeting will run from 7pm-9pm*

**Our meetings are in the Watauga County Public Library conference room. Watauga County Public Library in downtown Boone is located at 140 Queen Street, behind Mast General Store. If you get there before 7pm you will be able to go in the main door. After that we will enter and exit through the side door.**



Welcome to Jenn Matthews, our NAMI High Country Intern! Jenn is a Senior Psychology major and Music minor at Appalachian State University. She is an enthusiastic new member of NAMI and we are excited to have her participate in our organization. She will be with us for the spring semester.